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WAR MACHINE

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UNIVERSE

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FRIENDS NO MORE!

ABNETT
HAYNES
LABAT
GREENE

JAMES RHODES HAS BEEN A FIGHTER ALL HIS LIFE... FROM JUNGLE WAR ZONE FIREFIGHTS TO CUTTHROAT BOARDROOM DEALINGS. NOW, HIS BODY CLAD IN THE WARWEAR SYSTEM, AN ALIEN SECOND SKIN BRED FOR BATTLE, RHODES FACES THE MOST SURPRISING ADVERSARY OF ALL...
WHAT'S THIS?
THE GREAT ANTHONY STARK... SPEECHLESS?

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THE CHAOS VAULT, FORCE WORKS HQ, VENTURA.

OR ARE YOU JUST *MAD* AT ME FOR TRADING IN MY STARK HARDWARE FOR AN *IMPORT?*

I HEARD YOU'D LOST THE WAR MACHINE ARMOR. I SEE YOU'VE FOUND A REPLACEMENT.

BUT NONE OF THAT MATTERS NOW, ANYWAY. I WANT YOU OUT OF HERE, JIM. GO ***NOW.***

YOU ***DON'T*** WANT THIS TO PLAY OUT.

NO, I DON'T. BUT I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA THAT A FRIEND I'VE TRUSTED FOR YEARS HAS BETRAYED ***EVERYTHING*** HE EVER HELD DEAR.

POWER DOWN THE SUIT AND SURRENDER, TONY. FOR GOD'S SAKE, LET'S END IT HERE WITHOUT ANY MORE BLOODSHED.

THE LAST STAND

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OH, WE CAN CERTAINLY *END* IT.

I CAN'T MAKE ANY PROMISES ABOUT THE *BLOODSHED*, THOUGH.

KAVOOOOOM!

IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANT IT.

SHRAKKK!

GOOD. GOT HIM ROLLING. NOW, WHILE THERE'S TIME, I CAN SCOOT OFF A DRONE AS A BEACON FOR THE OTHERS...

... LET THEM KNOW I'VE FOUND IRON MAN BEFORE IT'S TOO L--

GAH!

WHAMMCH!!!

THAT'S SOME *FORMIDABLE* FIRE-POWER YOUR NEW *FRIGHT-SUIT* HAS, JIM...

...PLASMA-BASED, I'D GUESS, BUT DEFINITELY ***EXOTIC.*** THE FLOATING DRONES ARE A NICE FEATURE, TOO.

THIS AIN'T ***SHOW AND TELL,*** STARK.

IT'S BUILT FOR ***WAR.*** THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO WORRY ABOUT.

BUT I'M ***FASCINATED,*** JIM! I WISH I HAD A CHANCE TO STUDY THE ***EXTRATERRESTRIAL SECRETS*** YOUR SUIT CONTAINS. IT'S JUST A SHAME...

SO MURDEROUSLY.

... THERE WON'T BE A ***SHRED LEFT INTACT*** WHEN WE'RE THROUGH.

PULSED LASERS--A ***WHOLESALE BLITZ.***

I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM CUT LOOSE SO ***INDISCRIMINATELY.***

SHREEEKOOOM!

HE'S NOT THE MAN I KNEW. BUT I'M NOT THE MAN ***HE*** KNEW, EITHER.

I UNSKIN THE STARBOARD WEAPONS PLATFORM. AS IT FLOATS FREE, IT ORGANICALLY ***GROWS*** INTO THE CONCUSSION CANNON I MENTALLY SELECTED.

IT WHIPS ROUND ***BEHIND*** HIM IN LESS THAN A SECOND, AND SUCKER-PUNCHES MY OLD, ***HOMICIDAL*** FRIEND WITH AN ULTRASONIC ***HAMMERBLOW.***

AHKK!

ZAARKK-POOOOM!

WHOOM!

HE GOES DOWN, *HURT*...

... BUT I'M NOT READY FOR HIS *RETALIATION*.

WITH A SIDE-SWIPE OF REPULSOR FIRE, HE SMOKES THE REMOTE-PLATFORM.

THAT HASN'T HAPPENED BEFORE. I'M TOTALLY UNPREPARED FOR THE *SYMPATHETIC SHOCK WAVE* OF PAIN THAT EXPLODES THROUGH MY SHOULDER AND CHEST.

EARGHHH!

THE WARWEAR SCREAMS IN MY HEAD.

IT'S LIKE HE KILLED A *PART* OF US BOTH.

DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH THE *FORCE WORKS CHAOS MAINFRAME* WEIGHS, BUT HE'S RIPPED IT OFF ITS FLOOR MOUNT AND HOISTED IT ABOVE HIS HEAD.

BY THE TIME I REFOCUS, HE'S ON THE OFFENSIVE AGAIN.

REMOTE WEAPONS. VERY FANCY, JIM.

BUT NOTHING *LIKE* ENOUGH.

CATCH.

THE MAINFRAME SLAMS INTO ME LIKE AN EIGHTEEN WHEELER. WE GO SMASHING THROUGH THE VAULT WALL TOGETHER.

OUT INTO SPACE. OUT INTO THE ELEGANT SWEEP OF THE WORKS HQ CENTRAL ATRIUM.

KRAKKHTOOOOOOM

I'LL BE FLAT AS A FIVE SPOT IF I'M UNDER THIS WHEN IT SLAMS INTO THE ATRIUM FLOOR.

I REDIRECT ALL THE WARWEAR'S POWER TO THE WEAPONS AND RELEASE A BUST OF SUPERCHARGED PLASMA THROUGH THE CUFF MOUNTS.

KRAKOOM!

JUST ANOTHER REPAIR BILL FOR STARK ENTERPRISES.

HE CAN AFFORD IT, TOUGH. SEEMS HE CAN AFFORD *ANYTHING*.

JUST LIKE HE CAN AFFORD TO TURN AGAINST HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS AND *KILL* THEM.

DON'T I EVEN GET TO KNOW *WHY*, TONY?

IRON MAN WAS A *HERO*, MAN... A HERO ADMIRED AROUND THE WORLD! WHY THROW IT AWAY?

WHY BECOME THE SORT OF *MANIAC* YOU SPENT YOUR WHOLE *LIFE* FIGHTING?!

DON'T TAUNT ME, JIM. IT'S CHILDISH.

AND AS FOR AN EXPLANATION...

... I DON'T OWE YOU A *BLASTED THING*.

THEN I GUESS *I'M* THE ONE IN *DEBT*, 'CAUSE AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...

... I OWE IT TO YOU... TO *STOP* YOU.

GRSH!!

OUTSIDE, ON THE OVERLOOKING CLIFFS...

... REALITY SPASMS FOR A MOMENT AS A TELEPORT GATE CRACKLES OPEN.

THE ALIEN WARRIOR, CENTURY, PHASES BACK INTO THIS WORLD, CARRYING RACHEL CARPENTER, THE CHILD HE RUSHED TO SAFETY FROM THE CLUTCHES OF IRON MAN SCANT MOMENTS BEFORE.*

*SEE FORCE WORKS #19. - NEL

YOU'LL BE SAFE HERE, RACHEL.

I'M GLAD YOU'VE COME BACK, CENTURY.

IT'S BEEN REALLY **BAD** HERE. I THINK IRON MAN'S GONE **CRAZY**. SHOULDN'T WE GO BACK IN THERE AND HELP MR. RHODES?

FOOOOOOM!

PERHAPS **NOT**.

OOOH!

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND/BELIEVE/ LIKE ANY OF THIS. I HAVE NOT BEEN ABSENT LONG. NOW I RETURN TO FIND MY FRIENDS AT **WAR** WITH EACH OTHER.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GONG ON. AND I'M **SCARED**.

YOU'VE GOT TO HELP AMANDA, CENTURY. SHE SAID SHE WAS IN SOME KIND OF **BASEMENT**. AN' I THINK SHE WAS **HURT**.

I WILL DO MY BEST, LITTLE ONE.

U. S. AGENT AND I DISCOVERED A SECRET BASEMENT LEVEL DURING THE BROKER'S ATTACK*. STAY HERE, STAY **HIDDEN**.

I'LL RETURN FOR YOU, RACHEL... I **PROMISE**.

*IN FORCE WORKS #15. - NEL

UHHH!

KRAKOOOOM

HE'S NOT MOVING.

IS HE SHAMMING... OR HAVE I REALLY HURT HIM?

THE WARWEAR ISN'T READING *ANY* VITAL SIGNS.

OH, LORD. DESPITE ALL THAT'S AT STAKE, I DON'T WANT TO *KILL* HIM...

AGHHH-K-KK-KK!

TZZZAAAAK

THE SUB-BASEMENT, ONE VERTICAL MILE BENEATH WORKS HQ...

AMANDA? AMA--

-- NO!

SACRED FETH... NO!

YOU PICKED A REALLY *LOUSY* DAY TO REJOIN THE TEAM, E.T.

YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED OUT THERE IN SPACE WHERE YOU *BELONG.*

THE ONLY PLACE I "BELONG", CYBERMANCER, IS WHERE MY FRIENDS *NEED* ME.

OH, *PLEASE.* AND LOVE IS NEVER HAVING TO ADMIT YOU'RE *STUPID.*

CORNY GREETINGS CARD PHILOSOPHY IS HARDLY GOING TO SAVE YOU *NOW.*

ZACHOW!

THE VENTURA HIGHWAY, TEN MILES FROM WORKS HQ...

CAN'T THIS BUS GO ANY FASTER, AGENT?

THE WORKS WAGON'S GOT A RECOMMENDED TOP SPEED OF ONE THIRTY, TASHA, AND WE HAVEN'T DROPPED *CLOSE* TO THAT IN A GOOD WHILE.

OKAY, OKAY... BUT JIM HAD SUCH A HEAD START ON US. HOW MUCH FURTHER IS IT?

LEMME GUESS... YOU WERE THE KINDA KID WHO SAT IN THE BACK OF THE CAR ON FAMILY TRIPS AND WHINED "I'M THIRSTY! ARE WE THERE YET?" EVERY TEN M-

SKREEEEEECH

HEY..! LOOK AT THAT!

IT'S ONE OF JIM'S WEAPON DRONES!

YOU GOT *THAT* RIGHT. COME TO FETCH US...

... OR *WARN* US. HE MUST'VE FOUND *STARK*.

FLOOR IT, JACK!

HUH?

YOU ARE A RUTHLESS WOMAN, CYBERMANCER...

YOUR BLAST WOULD SURELY HAVE *SLAIN* SOMEONE WHO COULD NOT *REMOVE* HIMSELF FROM ITS PATH.

I AM QUITE DIFFERENT.

GAHH!

... BUT RIGHT NOW, YOU SHOULD ALSO BE *AFRAID*.

AN ENERGY SHIELD.

LUCKILY, I'M FAST ENOUGH TO STRIKE BENEATH IT AND DISABLE YOUR WEAPON-GLOVE.

THAT'S *ENOUGH!*

HEAT SEEKER!

YOU DON'T *LEARN*, DO YOU, CYBERMANCER?

TZZZZZZAKKK!

NO! IT'S LOCKING BACK ON ME!

ABORT! ABORT!

THOOOM!

HERE ENDETH THE LESSON.

WHA-? NOOO!

THWOOKK!

PLATO! THIS IS CENTURY! ARE YOU ACTIVE ON THIS LEVEL?

I AM VIRGIL, THE CHRONOGRAPHY SUITE MASTER CONTROL SYSTEM, MAY I ASSIST YOU?

THE MECHANISMS HERE ARE ACTIVE. WHAT IS THEIR PURPOSE?

AS PER MY INSTRUCTIONS, I AM UNDERTAKING PROTOCOL SIEGE PERILOUS.

WHICH IS?

THE SUSTAINED EXPOSURE OF THIS PLANESPHERE TO HIGH-BAND TEMPORAL ENERGY.

BUT... THAT WOULD SURELY INTERFERE WITH ALL THE *LIFE-FORCES ON EARTH !*

CORRECT.

EHKK!

CANCEL THE PROTOCOL! NOW!

UNABLE TO COMPLY.

THEN TELL ME... HOW LONG UNTIL THE PROCESS IS COMPLETE?

TWENTY ONE HOURS, SIXTEEN MINUTES...

AKKKK! T-TONY! NO! GAAAH!

SHUT UP, *JIM.* IT'S TOO LATE TO *BEG.*

CHOKING ME! CAN'T PRY HIS FINGERS LOOSE!

GOD HELP ME...

... THERE'S NO OTHER WAY!

FOOOOOM!

OUCH.

I ALWAYS *DID* UNDER-ESTIMATE YOU, RHODEY.

PLEASE, TONY. YOU'RE HURT...

... SURRENDER NOW, FOR *BOTH* OUR SAKES.

OR *WHAT?* WHAT WILL YOU DO, *OLD FRIEND?*

SHOOT ME FROM BEHIND? *KILL* ME?

Y-YES. *IF I HAVE TO!*

... OH DEAR GOD, *NO.*

I WON'T. THERE'S BEEN *TOO MUCH* KILLING ALREADY.

TZZLAAAAAWN

AGHHH!

I THOUGHT AS MUCH.

YOU PRETEND TO BE A MAN OF CONVICTION. JIM, BUT YOU'RE A WEAK FOOL... LIKE ALL THE *OTHERS.*

UHN!

UHN!

UHN!

TONY!

STARK TO VIRGIL. STATUS REPORT.

SIEGE PERILOUS PROTOCOL RUNNING. SYSTEMS SECURE. COUNTDOWN UNDERWAY.

DEFENSE COMMAND MORDRED. YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO USE ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO DEFEND YOURSELF. THAT INCLUDES ULTIMATE SANCTION. PLEASE CONFIRM INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS CONFIRMED. DEFENSE COMMAND MORDRED IN PLACE.

JIM? JIM!?!

OH, GOD... LOOK AT THIS PLACE!

TAKE IT EASY...

H-HE'S GONE...

I-I'LL BE OKAY. THE WARWEAR'S *REPAIRING* ITSELF... *AND* ME. I CAN *FEEL* IT.

BUT STARK'S GONE. I COULDN'T STOP HIM...

SHRAKKK!

AMANDA CHANEY IS DEAD. STARK HAS KILLED HER.

WHAT THE-?

CENTURY?!?

WHAT HAVE I RE-TURNED TO, JACK?

A *NIGHT-MARE*, PAL.

HELLO? IS THERE ANYONE THERE?

OH, MY GOD ! WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME HAS HAPPENED HERE?

STARK HAPPENED, WITCH.

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE WORST, WANDA. WHILE YOU'VE BEEN GONE, THINGS HAVE GOT ABOUT AS BAD AS I'VE *EVER* KNOWN THEM.

THINGS... ARE WORSE THAN EVEN *YOU* IMAGINE, BLACK WIDOW.

BENEATH OUR FEET, THE *END OF THE WORLD* IS UNDERWAY...

I FEEL KINDA OUT OF PLACE.

THIS IS STUFF FOR FORCE WORKS AND THE AVENGERS, NOW. I'VE DONE MY BIT... *LOUSED IT UP*, TOO.

MAYBE I SHOULD LEAVE.

... IF YOU CAN SPARE CENTURY, HE'LL BE THE QUICKEST WAY FOR ME TO REJOIN THE AVENGERS. I'D ALSO LIKE MOONRAKER TO ACCOMPANY US SO THAT HE CAN BRIEF US ALL ON THE MANTIS CONNECTION...

OKAY, NATASHA. IN THE MEANTIME, WE'LL TRY TO PENETRATE THE SUB-BASEMENT AND CONFRONT VIRGIL.

GOOD LUCK. LET'S KEEP THE COM-LINES OPEN.

CENTURY? IF YOU WOULD?

TZZZAAAAKKKK!

STAND CLOSE. MAKE NO SUDDEN MOVES.

OKAY, FORCE WORKS! LET'S GET TO WORK!

FISHER! SEE IF YOU CAN GET PLATO ON LINE AGAIN!

AGENT! WAR MACHINE!

MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T JUST *ASSUME* JIM'S GONNA SAY "YES, MA'AM"?

OF COURSE. I'M SORRY, JIM...

DON'T WORRY, WANDA. YOU WANT MY HELP, YOU *GOT* IT.

YOU... DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH THAT MEANS.

SO LET'S GO! THE MAIN ELEVATOR SHAFT IS OUR BEST BET.

I'LL SEE IF I CAN OVERRIDE THE SYSTEM AND--

--MAYBE NOT.

LET ME GUESS. THIS IS *BAD*, RIGHT?

DEFENSE COMMAND MORDRED IN OPERATION. VACATE THIS AREA **IMMEDIATELY**, OR YOU WILL BE **DESTROYED.**

DON'T MISS THE ACTION IN FORCE WORKS #20, IRON MAN #324, AVENGERS #394.... AND AVENGERS: TIMESLIDE! THEN BE BACK HERE IN THIRTY DAYS FOR JIM, THE WARWEAR, SKYE... AND THE END OF THE WORLD!